

# LEWIS & CLARK CAVERNS STATE PARK



REAL MONTANA. REAL CLOSE

## THE LIVING CAVE

CAVE LIFE IS THE RESULT OF A DELICATELY BALANCED ECOSYSTEM BASED UPON DECAY. CAVE SOIL, COMPRISED OF PIGEON, PACK RAT AND BAT DROPPINGS (GUANO) PROVIDES FOOD FOR BACTERIA AND FUNGI WHICH ARE THE ONLY PLANTS THAT SURVIVE TOTAL DARKNESS. THIS ORGANIC MATTER IS FED ON BY SPRINGTAILS AND MITES WHO ARE PREYED ON BY HARVESTMEN AND SPIDERS. THESE ARE THE "TRUE CAVE DWELLERS", HAVING ADAPTED TO LIFE IN DARKNESS WITH THE LOSS OF SIGHT AND COLOR PIGMENTATION.



THE WESTERN BIG-EARED BAT FORMS YEARLY NURSERY COLONIES OF UP TO 150 FEMALES AND INFANTS FROM APRIL TO SEPT. THE ADULT MALE "BIG-EARED" BATS ARE EXCLUDED, SOLITARY AND DO NOT LIVE IN THE CAVERNS BUT ARE GUESSED TO INHABIT NEARBY CAVES.



BUSHYTAIL WOODRATS ENTER INTO TOTAL DARKNESS TO NEST AND NEGOTIATE BY MEMORY, SMELL AND FEEL.



MAN HAS BECOME PART OF THE CAVERNS LIFE WITH 2.5 MILLION VISITORS TOURING THE CAVE SINCE ITS DISCOVERY! TRAIL DEVELOPMENT AND ARTIFICIAL LIGHTING ALLOWS US TO ENTER THE CAVERNS RESULTING IN TEMPERATURE AND HUMIDITY CHANGES. BY OUR SHEER NUMBERS WE ARE THE DIRTIEST VISITORS, BRINGING IN ORGANIC MATTER, SOIL AND DUST. A CONTINUAL CLEANING PROGRAM IS NECESSARY TO MAINTAIN THE CAVE SYSTEM IN AS NATURAL A STATE AS POSSIBLE.



Water percolating slowly through limestone dissolves calcite and carries it in solution through fissures in the rock, depositing it into the cave in an endless variety of SPELOETHEMS (cave formations). Three main formations: DRIPSTONES, FLOWSTONES & ERRATICS are formed by three key ingredients: water limestone & time



**DRIPSTONE – STALAGMITES**  
faster dripping water deposits calcite on the cave floor



**FLOWSTONE – RIBBONS**  
flowing water deposits calcite in ribbons or sheets



**DRIPSTONE – STALACTITES**  
slower dripping water deposits calcite on the cave ceiling



**ERRATIC – CLUSTERITE**  
(cave popcorn) from a large widespread area of slow water seepage



**DRIPSTONE – COLUMNS**  
when stalactites & stalagmites meet or one or the other grows all the way to ceiling or floor



**ERRATIC – HELICTITES**  
water seeps so slowly hydrostatic pressure overrides gravity & growth is upwards or sideways

## GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR VISIT

### TOUR THE SPECTACULAR CAVERNS AND STAY AWHILE

The 3000-acre park offers many amenities.

The Lower Visitor Center near the park entrance gives site as well as statewide information.

The campground offers 40 campsites, showers, dump station, restrooms and summer interpretive programs. Reservations are taken for its group use pavilion, 3 cabins and 1 tipi.

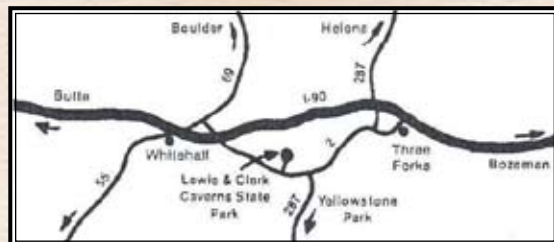
The park provides 10 miles of hiking trails with trailheads at the campground, park entrance gate, fishing access, Upper Picnic Area and Upper Visitor Center.

Two picnic areas are along the 3.2-mile long road to the Caverns. The upper contains a self-guided, ¼ mile Nature Trail plus another 2 mile interpretive trail. These shaded locations contain tables and vault toilets. Farther up, scenic turnouts offer excellent views of Greer Gulch, the Jefferson River and the Madison and Gallatin Mountains.

At the Upper Visitor Center, ask park staff about guided tour fees and schedules. Enjoy the historical displays, the caverns video and the model cave. Visit the concessions for a light lunch or gift. Relax in Montana's beauty at Cave Mountain.

### ABOUT THE TOUR

Park entrance is free to Montana residents. Fees are charged in the campground and for tours. Daily tours are May 1 to Sept. 30. Tours are a guided 2-mile, 2-hour walk with some stooping and bending required, rising 300 feet and descending 600 stairs. Wear rubber soled walking shoes and a sweater for the 50° cave temperature.



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Photo's by: Tom Forwood



1400 VERTICAL FEET ABOVE THE JEFFERSON RIVER LIES A SMALL HOLE IN THE SIDE OF A MOUNTAIN... THE ENTRANCE INTO ONE OF THE NORTHWEST'S MOST AWE-INSPIRING CAVES.

THE LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION PASSED JUST BELOW, ON THE RIVER IN 1805, NEVER KNOWING THE CAVERNS EXISTED.

103 YEARS LATER PRESIDENT THEODORE ROOSEVELT PROCLAIMED THEM LEWIS AND CLARK CAVERNS IN HONOR OF THE "CORPS OF DISCOVERY", CREATING OUR 15TH NATIONAL MONUMENT.

THEY ARE PRESERVED AND MAINTAINED BY THE MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS.



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